

DISCUSSION

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Are we ourselves in L2 conversations?

Twenty years of my own keen interest in situated identities and interaction learning makes me naturally interested in A. Nowicka's paper. I find in it my own old fascinations filtered through slightly different perspectives: of the author and of her readings. I also find in it the same research problems I had to face when I tried to apply Conversation Analysis to teacher/student (native speaker/non-native speaker) discourse: its inconclusiveness and elusiveness.

The questions that arise refer to the students' ability (and indeed feasibility) to renegotiate their identities in conversations with teachers and/or native speakers. Should they identify with more open and outspoken English native speaker students, while running the risk of sounding artificial? Or should they identify with their peer non-native group and stay in asymmetrical roles of inhibited learners, while retaining their original identities?

It seems that a gradual change of verbal and non-verbal patterns of behavior in second language conversations as a genuine change of one's identity (e.g. self-presentation as a more assertive person) is possible if students grow aware of the value of particular personality traits, and indeed become more mature and self-directed. On the other hand, superficial repetition of native-like interactional patterns in the English class does not seem to change one's identity. The difference between the two behaviors is like the difference between language acquisition and language memorization.